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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000464

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GR](#) [TU](#) [OSCE](#)

SUBJECT: PATRIARCH,S "60 MINUTES" INTERVIEW CREATES A STIR

REF: ISTANBUL 326

Classified By: Consul General Sharon A. Wiener for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. A harsh media buzz continues to reverberate over the Patriarch's December 20 comments in the "60 Minutes" program that he feels "crucified" as a member of the Greek Orthodox community in Turkey. The program focused on the shrinking number of Christians in the Middle East, including 14 minutes featuring the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul and a profile interview of Patriarch Bartholomew. Prior to airing the program, CBS released a trailer to the broadcast, including an inaccurate portrayal of the population exchange of 1923. It closed with the Patriarch responding affirmatively to the interviewer's question as to whether or not he felt personally "crucified" given the current situation of the Greek Orthodox community in Turkey. A contact at the Patriarchate contended to poloff that it had no control over the program or how the facts would be portrayed. Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc harshly criticized the Patriarch's statements in the program and demanded an explanation. Foreign Minister Davutoglu called the Patriarch's choice of words "unfortunate." Despite the furor, the Patriarch's lawyer told us that the Patriarch has no additional security concerns and has not requested additional security from the MFA or MOI. She added that on December 21 or 22 the Patriarch would issue a public statement clarifying his statements on "60 Minutes". End Summary.

12. (C) On December 20, CBS's "60 Minutes" aired a program on the shrinking number of Christians in the Middle East, including 14 minutes featuring the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul and a profile interview of Patriarch Bartholomew. The Patriarchate explained to poloff that the production crew was in Istanbul in July, alternately filming scenes from Istanbul and interviewing the Patriarch for several hours at a time. Four days prior to airing the program, CBS released a trailer to the program, including an inaccurate portrayal of the population exchange of 1923 and closing with the Patriarch responding affirmatively to the interviewer's leading question as to whether or not he felt personally "crucified" sometimes in Turkey given the difficult situation of the Greek Orthodox community in Turkey.

Patriarchate: "We Had No Control"

13. (C) Paul Gikas, the Patriarchate's correspondence official, told poloff that prior to filming he had explained to the "60 Minutes" production crew that the Patriarch usually receives questions for interviews in advance and many times the Patriarchate reviews programs in advance before their release. CBS representatives responded by explaining

that that's not how they operate. "We didn't have any control over it," Gikas claimed. While the Patriarchate insisted that the production crew understood the facts related to the population exchange and other topics, the program instead chose to describe it only as the expelling of 1.5 million Greeks from Turkey.

Critical Domestic Reaction

¶4. (U) The Turkish press and broadcast news picked up on the trailer on December 18 and focused on the Patriarch's agreement to the reporter's use of the term "crucified." Many columnists on December 19 considered the Patriarch's statements in the trailer to be an overreaction, and that he failed to acknowledge the rights that minorities enjoy under Turkish law. Foreign Minister Davutoglu issued a statement saying that the Patriarch's comment on crucifixion was "unfortunate" and that he hoped it "was a slip of the tongue." In addition to Davutoglu's comment, Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc said regardless of misinterpretations, the answer given "was very wrong. The Turkish nation was offended by his statement. I hope he will make an explanation." According to the Patriarchate's lawyer, Kezban Hatemi, the MFA has not delivered any separate message to the Patriarchate beyond Davutoglu's statement.

¶5. (C) On Sunday, December 20, newspapers carried a statement from the Patriarchate's lawyer, Kezban Hatemi, which emphasized the need to contextualize the Patriarch's statements. Hatemi claimed that a Greek's use of the phrase

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"feeling crucified" is similar to the common Turkish phrase about suffering the torments of hell. Hatemi told poloff that the Patriarch would provide clarification in a statement to the press either on December 21 or December 22.

"We have no additional security concerns"

¶6. (C) Given his position and previous threats, the Patriarch is assigned a body guard from the Turkish National Police and two police officers staff a police box outside of the Patriarchate throughout the day. Hatemi dismissed questions about increased threats or a need for additional security, stating that the Patriarch had no additional security concerns. According to Hatemi, the Patriarchate has not requested additional security from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of the Interior. The MFA told the Charge on December 19 that the Patriarch already had adequate security and, as a prominent citizen of Turkey, he would continue to be protected.

International Reaction

¶7. (U) The Greek Foreign Ministry issued a statement published in Turkish papers on December 21 in which it placed responsibility on the GOT for the conditions of the Greek Orthodox population in Turkey. It noted that "we all, and especially those who are responsible for the situation the Ecumenical Patriarchate is in today, have to take what the Patriarch said into consideration. Turkey's responsibilities are known and nobody can pretend that they do not know. Problems, obstacles, and deficiencies are mentioned in detail in the EU reports."

Comment

¶8. (C) The Patriarch's statement on December 21 or 22 might be too late to stem the negative reaction that has already begun. The portrayal of the condition of the Greek Orthodox by "60 Minutes" is sensationalist and does not encourage the good will necessary to address the questions of reopening the

Halki Seminary and patriarchal succession. While the program was filmed prior to the promising Buyukada lunch on August 15 (reftel), Arinc's statement especially is of concern as the Patriarchate informed us following the lunch that Erdogan had assigned Arinc to address the issue of reopening Halki. A solution for the Greek Orthodox community cannot be found unless both sides continue a sincere dialogue - inflammatory statements, on either side, do not help.

WIENER